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C O N F I D E N T I A L MUSCAT 000875

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR NEA/ARPI AND NEA/IPA

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [ETRD](#) [EAID](#) [KPAL](#) [KBCT](#) [XF](#) [MU](#)

SUBJECT: OMANI RESPONSE TO MESSAGE TO THE ARAB LEAGUE:
WILLING TO GO BEYOND USG REQUEST, BUT NOT JUST YET

REF: A. SECSTATE 97599

[B](#). 04 MUSCAT 2178

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires, a.i., William R. Stewart.
Reason: 1.4 (b, d).

Summary

[1](#)1. (C) Defending Oman's forward-leaning track record toward Israel, and indicating a willingness to go even beyond USG requests for expanding ties with it, the Omani Foreign Ministry argued that Israel's delay in matching Palestinian Authority implementation of Roadmap commitments prevents Muscat from taking bold initiatives at this time. The Ministry praised the President's support for the PA, but needs to see Israeli deeds match positive rhetoric to overcome growing frustration with perceived Israeli intransigence. End summary.

[1](#)2. (U) With the Foreign Minister on regional travel, CDA delivered ref A demarche May 31 to MFA Under Secretary Sayyid Badr al-Busaidi. Sayyid Badr was joined by Arab Department Chief Ambassador Ahmed al-Harthy, Deputy Chief of North American Department Riadh al-Raisi, and Political Affairs Director to the U/S Humaid al-Maani. CDA was accompanied by A/DCM.

Need to See More Progress on Israel's Part

[1](#)3. (C) In response to our demarche, Sayyid Badr stressed the fact that Oman has always been "open-minded" to the possibilities of relations with Israel, as proven by its track record hosting an Israeli trade office (closed in 2000). The Sultanate, he said, may be prepared to go "even beyond" what we requested in our demarche. But at the present time, Oman has seen more in the way of statements and gestures than actual progress on the ground. Israel's delay in implementing its Gaza withdrawal, the lack of a formal resumption of bilateral negotiations with the PA, and the expansion of settlements in the Palestinian territories are actually building greater frustration, even though "everyone is saying the right things." The Under Secretary noted that Oman is not alone in its frustration, but that the PA is telling Muscat the same things. The Roadmap, he said, remains "ink on paper," and while the PA -- under difficult circumstances -- has lived up to its Roadmap commitments, Israel has made no comparable effort on its part.

Defending Level of Oman's Israel Links

[1](#)4. (C) CDA acknowledged that it takes deeds on both sides to bring progress in the peace process, but suggested the Israeli government may find greater room for maneuver with its domestic constituency were it able to point to broader engagement with moderate Arab states like Oman. Sayyid Badr replied that Minister Responsible for Foreign Affairs Yusuf bin Alawi conferred with his Israeli counterpart in New York in 2004 and continues to hold periodic telcons with him, and hosted a bilateral meeting with an Israeli MFA Deputy Director General on the margins of an Executive Council meeting of the Middle East Desalination Research Center (MEDRC) last December (ref B). Similar future meetings are likely to happen. Sayyid Badr also noted that Oman continues to play host to the MEDRC, which he described as virtually the sole remaining vestige of 1990's-era efforts to bring Israel and Arab states closer together. The Omanis also noted that, despite the closing of the Israeli Trade Office during the second Intifada, Oman imposes no boycott on Israeli goods.

[1](#)5. (C) Ambassador al-Harthy pointed out that the MFA has a domestic constituency to answer to as well, and that improving relations with Israel is a "tough sell" absent demonstrable progress in the Roadmap. Sayyid Badr rounded off the discussion by praising President Bush's statements and support of PA President Abbas. The Omanis did not respond to our points about Magen David Adom's membership in

the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement.
STEWART